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DE RUEHIN #0895/01 1130913
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 230913Z APR 07
FM AIT TAIPEI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4976
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 6661
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 7911

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DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/TC, EAP/PA, EAP/PD - LLOYD NEIGHBORS
DEPARTMENT PASS AIT/WASHINGTON

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: VIRGINIA TECH SHOOTING INCIDENT,
U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS

11. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies continued to focus news coverage from April 21-23 on the year-end legislators' elections and the 2008 presidential election; on the Virginia Tech shooting incident and its aftermath; and on other local political and social issues. On April 22, the pro-independence "Liberty Times" ran an exclusive news story on page six with the headline "Taiwan Continues to Communicate with the United States over Its Strategy to join the World Health Organization."

12. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a column in the pro-unification "United Daily News" discussed the Virginia Tech shooting incident. The article said it will be a total loss for everyone "if people fail to subdue their hatred toward the shooter with rationality and instead, turn it into collective feud against skin colors." An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" urged the United States to tighten its gun control laws. With regard to U.S.-Taiwan relations, the "Liberty Times" carried the Chinese translation of an article by John J. Tkacik, a senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation, which urged Washington to give a formal and detailed definition of the status quo in the Taiwan Strait. An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" suggested that a new balance be struck in Washington-Taipei relations. End summary.

13. Virginia Tech Shooting Incident

A) "The Original Sin of Skin [Colors]"

Journalist Wang Li-mei wrote in the "United Notes" column in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] (4/21):

"The aftermath of the Virginia Tech shooting incident can still be felt. Some South Korean students, in fear of revenge, have chosen to leave the United States and return to their country earlier than scheduled. In other U.S. states, there were reports saying that students from Taiwan were insulted and told to 'go back to Asia.' The spread of hostility seemed to move even faster than the speed of nuclear weapons. ...

"How a terrorist act by an individual student can turn out to be a national or racial issue is a problem brewing beneath the surface that can hardly be explained using common sense. In fact, the American people will probably focus more attention on their gun control laws [than on ethnic tensions] when they look at this shooting incident. But immigrants from minority ethnic groups such as those from South Korea, China, Taiwan, and other Asian countries, cannot but feel worried about the hostility and revenge against them from other ethnic groups. This is the reason why Beijing was extremely nervous when rumor had it earlier that the gunman came from mainland China. If Cho Seung-Hui were Chinese, the follow-on effects, as a result of the competitive relationship between the

United States and China, would definitely be much stronger than what they are now. ...

"The unfriendliness shown by the United States toward Arabs in the wake of the September 11 attacks is the reason why ethnic groups in Asia feel uneasy right now. It is fortunate that Americans in general have demonstrated a certain degree of control and rationality, and this is a learning process that a melting pot society needs to undergo. It will be a total loss for all if [people] fail to subdue their hatred toward Cho with rationality and instead, turn it into a collective feud against skin colors."

B) "Time for U.S. to Act on Guns"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (4/21):

"The carnage at Virginia Tech this week, the worst gun rampage in U.S. history and one that claimed 33 lives, is a grim reminder that the United States should do something about its lax gun control laws, which have made lethal weapons too readily available to its citizens. ... If U.S. President George W. Bush is so determined to eliminate the threat of weapons of mass destruction, or at least stop the proliferation of WMDs, he should have the same zeal in eliminating the real threat of at home-WMDs, or weapons of mass killing. The old notion that deems sacred the right to bear firearms is no longer true in the 21st century, when gun use and violence in the United States is getting out of control. The easy availability of WMDs wreaks havoc on the country. The death toll from handguns is four times that of 9-11. Hopefully, the bloodbath at Virginia Tech is tragic enough for Americans to do something about their lax gun control laws. If they do, then the deaths of 33 people will acquire some meaning."

14. U.S.-Taiwan Relations

A) "Determine Taiwan's 'Status quo'"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 500,000] carried the Chinese translation of an article by John J. Tkacik, a senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation (4/23 - English original unavailable):

"... There is no need for Washington to react sensitively to the change of status quo in the Taiwan Strait; instead, it needs a set of premeditated policies that can pre-empt against such 'change,' or dole out a penalty when the change becomes extreme. How to deal with China's invasion [against Taiwan] may be termed the 'real status quo,' which is more important than dealing with Taiwan's efforts to articulate proactively its real existence as a nation. Thus, it will be a positive move for the Bush administration's National Security Council to define practically 'the status quo as we determine it' -- or if necessary, it can be done in classified documents -- before it attempts to react to any change to the status quo. ...

"Washington's failure to give a formal and detailed definition of 'the status quo as we determine' is akin to ceding its leading role in [defining the status quo] to Beijing and Taipei, and when tension rises [across the Taiwan Strait], American diplomats can only respond reactively, in a panic..."

B) "Taiwan-U.S. Ties Need New Balance"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (4/23):

"There can be no doubt that relations between Taiwan and the United States have experienced ups and downs during the seven years coinciding with the Democratic Progressive Party administration of President Chen Shui-bian and the Republican Party administration in Washington of President George W. Bush. ... While pushing forward the deepening of democratization through political reforms including the holding of Taiwan's first national citizen referendums and pushing constitutional reform, one of the biggest problems that President Chen and the DPP government has faced internationally is how to cope with the unfair but damaging image that Taiwan is a trouble maker in cross-strait relations. ...

"In line with such preconceptions, the Bush administration has repeated its warnings to President Chen to stick to his so-called 'four noes' pledge of May 2000 and to display more responsibility and consistency. Although we believe most reform policies adopted by the Chen administration have been in line with Taiwan's urgent course of deepening democracy, it cannot be denied that a serious gap over timing and judgment has occurred between Taipei and Washington and that a balance needs to be struck, a state of affairs which regrettably has not been recognized sufficiently by the two sides so far. ...

"On Taiwan's side, President Chen may believe he has been careful in not actually doing anything to give Beijing cause to literally go 'ballistic.' However, decision-makers in Washington (and other capitals) are more concerned about the risks of miscalculation and remain frustrated over the fact that the Taiwan government apparently lacks the determination to bolster its own defensive capability by passing the long-delayed budgets for three advanced defensive systems and may even tend to take U.S. military assistance in the case of a cross-strait conflict for granted. Regardless of who is right or wrong, we believe the most important task is to reinforce Taiwan's public diplomacy into U.S. constituencies as well as strengthening communication between the two governments.

"Taiwan urgently needs to fundamentally readjust its public diplomatic strategy and readjust manpower and other resources. Effecting such as readjustment is partly the task of the new Taiwan representative to the United States, former Mainland Affairs council chairman Joseph Wu. ...In the face of the PRC's global propaganda over its supposed peaceful development and aim to build a harmonious international society, Taiwan needs to mobilize both official and civic resources to launch a worldwide educational campaign that can debunk Beijing's propaganda and allow the international community to understand why Taiwan's continued democratic progress is vital to the world community. ..."

YOUNG